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Russia's Udmurt people lost, adrift

IZHEVSK, Russia (BP) — No father should have to bury a son, but the world can be a sad place -- particularly the piece of it called Udmurtia (OOD-MER-ti-yah) in the foothills of Russia's Ural Mountains.

On a spring day there last year, Leonid touched his son Yevgeny's cold, pale cheek for the last time and wept as Yevgeny was lowered into the silent ground. Yevgeny, 21, hanged himself after a drinking binge. It was the third suicide of the year in the tiny Udmurt (OOD-mert) village of 30 families.

Why? Hopelessness. Aimlessness. Spiritual poverty. "Young people want everything and they want it now," Leonid says, sitting at his kitchen table a few months later. "My son was that way. They watch TV and can't tell the difference between fantasy and reality. With no work, all they do is drink."

The gulf between soaring expectations and grim, jobless reality overwhelms some young Udmurts. They brood, drink, sniff glue, become depressed, sometimes suicidal.

Leonid folds his burly arms and shakes his head. For a long

moment, he looks out the window at the rolling hills that stretch to the forest. He pours more tea for his Christian guests. Normally good-natured and cheerful, the 43-year-old former teacher manages a smile and even a quip or two.

He brags about the home-grown herbs he uses to brew his tea. But soon he grows pensive again. "We Udmurts are famous for healing herbs," he says. "Yet we have the second-highest suicide rate in Russia. I don't understand it."

In many ways, Leonid's personal tragedy symbolizes the struggle of the Udmurt people. But he also symbolizes hope for the Udmurt, because Leonid has become a believer in Jesus Christ.

He was led to faith by Vasily Zagrebin, an Udmurt Baptist evangelist, and Southern Baptist missionary Tim Wicker. Now he wants to help take the Gospel from village to village, so other Udmurts might know hope and escape the hopelessness his son suffered.

The Udmurts were the focus of this year's Day of Prayer and Fasting for World Evangelization,

Southern Baptists observed on May 27 (Pentecost Sunday).

The Udmurt people, who number about 770,000, are one of the larger non-Muslim groups in Russia. Ethnically related to the Finns, they probably have occupied what is now known as Udmurtia for millennia. Written history, however, records their emergence as a distinct people in the sixth century A.D.

This pastoral group has been dominated by various peoples and empires over the centuries, including the Mongols, the Russians and the Soviets. Their communist-era Udmurt Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic became the democratic Republic of Udmurtia in 1990 as the Soviet Union crumbled, but it remains a part of the current Russian Federation.

The Udmurts have been nominal adherents of the Russian Orthodox Church since they were forcibly converted by Russian monks and military commanders in the 1700s, but their skin-deep Christianity has mingled ever since with older, deeper layers of animism and nature worship.

An estimated 2,000 Udmurts are evangelical followers of Christ — barely a quarter of one percent of their total population. Some 200 of them worship with ethnic Russians in the nine Baptist churches of Udmurtia. Few evangelical churches are considered truly Udmurt; most preach and teach in Russian with a mixture of Udmurt and Russian worship songs.

Traditionally, Udmurts revered sacred forests (they are known as "people of the woods"), the land, the sky, the sun, water, spirits, ancestors, their mythical creator "Inmar" and a host of lesser deities. They made sacrifices to their gods in forests and sacred barns, but knew nothing of personal repentance or divine forgiveness. They saw their offerings as barter-in exchange for a good crop, fertility and prosperity.

How much do the old ways influence Udmurts today? Some say paganism has faded. Others see a direct link between pagan practice and the alcoholism and suicide that torment their people.

At the annual Gerber Festival, one of the major cultural celebrations of the Udmurts, a woman approached Southern Baptist

missionary Tim Wicker and asked if he understood the meaning of the festival. "You're basically celebrating first fruits," he replied.

"Yes, but it's more than that," she answered. "You worship Jesus. We worship Jesus and the sky and the trees and the earth. Today we're offering sacrifices to the god of the earth."

For most Udmurts at the festival, it was probably just a cultural event, Wicker reflects, "but there were folks there who genuinely saw it as a time to offer meat to pagan gods."

Whatever their origins, the problems of the Udmurts threaten their long-term existence. Like many indigenous peoples, particularly in the former Soviet Union, they have experienced a cultural revival in recent years. Yet as one Udmurt leader laments, "We are a minority in our own republic," which is socially and economically dominated by the Russians.

Most Udmurts live in small villages, many of which count only a few families. The years of economic chaos after the fall of communism hit Udmurtia hard. Decent jobs remain hard to find. Higher education is even harder to attain. Many Udmurts get by on family gardens.

The birthrate in the countryside is low. The mortality rate from alcoholism, particularly among men, is high. Some Udmurt young people leave for the cities and assimilate into Russian culture. They try to forget their rich language and ethnic heritage or never learn it in the first place.

For those who stay in the villages, what's left? "Youth in the countryside can't see the future or the meaning of life," says a young Christian in Izhevsk, Udmurtia's capital. "They don't have anything to look forward to."

Lights of hope are flickering like scattered candles in the darkness surrounding the Udmurts. "I genuinely sense that God is working among them now," says Wicker, who is based in Moscow. He directs Southern Baptists' "virtual strategy coordinator" initiative for some of Russia's key unreached peoples. The effort connects Gospel-needy peoples with Southern Baptists in the United States who commit to reaching them.

Moore tapped for Missions Mobilization post

Karen E. Moore has been approved by the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board Executive Committee to serve as consultant in the board's Missions Mobilization Department, effective immediately.

"Karen's experience as a journeyman to West Africa, director of the Holmes Community College Baptist Student Union, and as a participant in numerous volunteer mission opportunities makes her a valuable addition to Missions Mobilization," said Missions Mobilization Director Ken Rhodes.

"Karen will lead in the development of a Global Impact Resource Center, housed in the Missions Mobilization office. She will have responsibilities in the areas of research, orientation, and connecting churches to mobilization opportunities. She will also serve as a student mobilization liaison with church and collegiate student ministries," Rhodes said.

Moore had previously worked as a contract specialist in the Missions Mobilization Department while serving as interim college and singles minister at First Church, Clinton. She was Baptist Student Union director at Holmes Community College in Goodman from 1999-2003.

She served as a journeyman with the International Mission Board (IMB) of the Southern Baptist Convention from 1997-99. Her duties



Moore

included directing the Baptist Center in Bamako, Mali, West Africa; teaching English and aerobics, and homeschooling four missionary children.

She was stationed in southeast Asia by IMB during the summer of 2002, where she worked as a student mobilization assistant. She also served on the Centrifuge youth camp staff at Union University in Jackson, Tenn., during the summer of 2001, and on the youth faculty at Gulfshore Assembly during the summer of 1996.

Moore holds a Master of Arts in Christian Education degree (2004) from New Orleans Seminary, and a Bachelor of Science degree (1997) from the University of Southern Mississippi in Hattiesburg. She is also a 1993 graduate of Aberdeen High School in Aberdeen.

"One of my main responsibilities is to develop the Global Impact Resource Center as an up-to-date, comprehensive location for research, exploration, leader development, and orientation with North American partners and throughout the world," Moore said. "I want to be someone our Mississippi Baptist churches can call on for help with their missions involvement."

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Take heart, Mississippi Baptists. Our news and entertainment media (one and the same, actually) love to constantly describe America's young people as thoroughly hedonistic and out of control, but there are many groups of fine Christian young people who have their act together. They should make us proud.

One of those groups among the many is the summer missionary contingent of Mississippi Baptist Student Union members, who raise their own funds each year to criss-cross the globe with the message of eternal salvation through Jesus Christ. As they prepare to go afielid in the next few days and weeks, we should note that their numbers set another record this year.

They are not ashamed of the Gospel message, and they are not afraid. One subset of this group is right now on its way to a country officially hostile to Christians, where they will hike many miles over rough mountain terrain to spend the summer with a recently-identified people group that has never heard the name of Jesus spoken. They are hiking in with the meager supplies in their backpacks, and trusting God to provide the rest.

These are our Mississippi Baptist children, not some far-

If I had a world of my own, everything would be nonsense. Nothing would be what it is because everything would be what it isn't," said Alice. "And contrary-wise; what it is it wouldn't be, and what it wouldn't be, it would. You see?

If the main character in Lewis Carroll's classic *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* were a real person and living today, she would be a postmodern guru.

Postmodernism is the philosophy that has captivated the masses of Western Civilization. Its central tenet is that moral absolutes don't exist or cannot be known. Thus, individuals are allowed and even encouraged to do, as the Bible puts it, "what is right in their own eyes."

The only taboo that postmodernism rejects is judgment. Since moral absolutes are not determined culturally, everything under the sun is to be tolerated except intolerance.

The fruit of postmodern philosophy is bitter at best. It has conned society into believing sex is nothing more than a recreational pursuit. Marriage has come to be viewed by many as nothing more than an unnecessary and even negative social contract. Illegitimate births are now considered virtuous.

In terms of sexuality, postmodernism does not allow any behavior to be deemed aberrant. Thus, homosexuality is accepted

The next generation



COMMISSIONING STUDENTS — Parents, friends, and onlookers crowd the Grand Hall of the B.C. Rogers Student Center on the campus of Mississippi College in Clinton for the April 14 commissioning service of 195 summer missionaries. The total number of summer missionaries from Mississippi Baptist Student Unions around the state is a new record. (Photo by William H. Perkins Jr.)

away organization of which we've never before heard. Other BSU summer missionaries will spend their school break just as far from home, while still others will serve in just about every region of this country. They have heard God's call and answered, never questioning Him or His plans for them. They have put aside the worldly pleasures of this world in favor of winning souls to Christ.

While they raise their own funds for their summer Kingdom work, they are supported logically by a number of groups, including:

- Collegiate Ministry Department of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board.
- Missions Mobilization Department of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board.

• North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention.

• International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention.

• their churches and associations.

"For more than 60 years, Mississippi Baptist Student Union has been sending college students on mission around the world," said Weaver McCracken, Collegiate Ministry Director at the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board. "Now more than ever, students are responding in record numbers. Through this summer, Mississippi BSU will have mobilized more than 3,400 students and given more than \$3.4 million to send them.

"Significantly, more than two million dollars have been given

just in the past 15 years with more than 1,900 of those students serving.

"God is blessing, and Mississippi Baptist college students are responding."

Amen!

"I truly believe that having a part in missions is not just the call of one or two believers, but that it is the call on all of our lives to step outside of what we are comfortable with, whether it be through monetary support, prayer support, or actually going to the streets where we live, and all over the world."

"There are needs to be met and people to be shown the truth and freedom in Christ all over the world. It is the Lord who placed the desire in my heart to serve this summer in California and to show a love that is a reflection of the love I have received," said Anna Bishop of Brookhaven, a freshman at Mississippi College.

Think about this: Anna Bishop is just one of a record 195 student summer missionaries this year who feel the same way, and one of thousands involved every day in the life of our Baptist Student Unions — and one of many thousands across the country who understand the urgency of our Lord's Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20).

Let us spend the summer in prayer for them without ceasing. After all, they are our greatest earthly hope for the future of our faith. In our confused and violent world, that should mean everything to us.

mits consensual sex between an adult and a young person beginning at age 12. Dutch law does allow for prosecutions of "coercive sex" if sought by a child or a child's parents.

"Teens often seek out sex with older people, and they do so for understandable reasons: an older person makes them feel sexy and grown-up, protected and special," Levine writes. It is worth noting that Levine acknowledges having had an affair with an adult when she was a minor.

In commenting on the sex scandal involving Roman Catholic priests, Levine told Newhouse News Service, that, "yes, conceivably, absolutely" a boy's sexual experience with a priest could be positive.

God help our children, and our children's children, if the flood of postmodernism is able to drown moral outrage concerning bestiality and pedophilia. Our world will become what Alice, the postmodern guru of Lewis Carroll's fiction, envisioned.

Everything will be nonsense. Nothing will be what it is because everything will be what it isn't — and contrary-wise, what it is it will not be, and what it will not be, it will.

In such a world, morality and human dignity is a farce.

Bogg's commentary appears courtesy of Baptist Press.

GUEST OPINION:

Living in Alice's wonderland

*By Kelly Boggs, editor
Louisiana Baptist Message*

as a natural, normal and healthy lifestyle. The same is true for bisexuality. Transsexuals (those who undergo sex reassignment surgery) are just part of the cultural landscape.

Postmodernism has desensitized most of the West, including America, to any pang of immorality. Nothing seems to shock us any more. Even more tragic, we don't appear bothered by our moral numbness.

What will it take to jolt us from our philosophical fog? Is there any moral line that postmodernism might cross where we will finally say, "Enough"?

There are two areas of sexuality that the postmodern flood has yet to engulf. However, the nonjudgmental wave is encroaching upon them even as I write these words.

Bestiality and pedophilia have long been taboos in civilized cultures throughout the ages. However, if postmodernism has its way, that will soon change.

One of the most talked-about films at the Cannes Film Festival this year is Zoo, which follows a group of Washington state men and their relationships with horses. The director has admitted that he purposely avoided including in the film any judgments on the men's behavior.

Peter Singer, professor of bioethics at Princeton University, has long held that the taboo against bestiality should be jettisoned.

Concerning pedophilia, academics fueled by postmodern thinking have already begun to question whether sexual relations between an adult and a child should be considered immoral. The most notable is author Judith Levine.

In 2002, the University of Minnesota Press published Levine's book, Harmful to Minors: The Perils of Protecting Children from Sex. In it, she cites the Dutch age-of-consent law as a "good model" — it per-

Mass. homosexual marriage numbers fall

BOSTON (BP) — Following an early rush to city hall, the number of homosexual marriages in Massachusetts has plunged dramatically and continues to decline since such unions were legalized three years ago.

In the last seven and a half months of 2004 — homosexual marriage became legal in mid-May that year — 6,121 homosexual couples received marriage licenses from the state, but in 2005, that number dropped to 2,060, and in 2006, to 1,427.

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health statistics, cited first by Newhouse News Service, show that of the 9,608 total homosexual marriages performed from 2004-06, 64% were performed in the first year alone despite the fact it was legal for just half of that year.

If the downward trend continues, the number of homosexual marriages will fall well below 1,000 by the end of this year. Newhouse News said that through April 26, only 87 same-sex couples had married.

The statistics, pro-family experts say, should impact the nationwide debate over the issue. "This data that we're seeing completely supports this idea that it's not so much marriage itself that [homosexuals] want, but it's the change to marriage," Glenn Stanton, a sociologist and a research fellow with Focus on the Family, told Baptist Press.

"It's the deconstruction of family that is so important to them. They are not availing themselves of this so-called right or benefit that they legally now

have in Massachusetts," he said.

Homosexual activists, Stanton said, are interested more in the symbolism behind homosexual marriage legalization.

"They understand that when you redefine marriage to say that it's not about male and female, that you have done something culturally radical and significant, at least from their perspective," he said. "You've normalized homosexuality, but you've [also] deconstructed humanity to say that... male and female really are, as they've said all along, mere social constructs — but they're not [mere social constructs], and we're going to find out they're not to our own peril, so it is so much more than the normalization of homosexuality."

States that have same-sex unions — which grant the benefits of marriage, minus the name — have seen similar trends. According to data cited in USA Today and The Star-Ledger:

- In Vermont, 2,091 couples got civil union licenses in 2000, the first year it was legal. Last year, only 548 couples did.

- In Connecticut, only 18 percent of homosexual couples in the state got a civil union license in the first 15 months they were legal there. (Census data from 2000 was used to ascertain the number of couples within the state.)

- In New Jersey, 852 couples obtained a civil unions license in the first three months after they became legal this year.

Interestingly, the USA Today story about civil unions cited Carisa Cunningham of Gay and Lesbian Advocates and Defenders as saying civil unions were no longer popular because same-sex couples now were "waiting for marriage" legalization, but the USA Today story ran one month prior to the new data out of the Bay State about homosexual marriages.

The latest data out of Massachusetts also showed that 64% of the marriages there involved lesbians. Likewise, 60% of the civil unions in

New Jersey have involved women.

"That's a huge thing, and what it points to is that men and women are different," Stanton said. "We don't find as many gay men entering these relationships because gay men are not real big on long-term commitment. It does happen, very rarely, but most of the time they're not interested in settling down. They're interested in exploring their opportunities and possibilities.

"It's women who are more interested in settling down and committing to one another, but in lesbian relationships, you have much higher relational vulnerability and volatility, and you also have more domestic violence, because what you have is two women expecting too much relational energy out of a relationship than it can provide."

A three-year study by University of Chicago researchers released in 2004 showed that 42.9% of homosexual men in Chicago's Shoreland area had more than 60 sexual partners, while an additional 18.4% had between 31 and 60 partners. All total, 61.3% of the area's homosexual men had more than 30 partners, and 87.8% had more than 15, the research found.

Such promiscuity has consequences: 55.1% of homosexual males in Shoreland had at least one sexually transmitted disease.

In the U.S., homosexual men are barred from donating blood because of their high risk of infection of HIV.

The Food and Drug Administration reaffirmed the policy May 23, the Associated Press reported. It was first put in place in 1983.

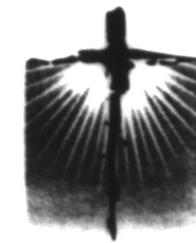
The male-female relationship, within the bond of marriage, provides benefits that homosexual relationships cannot, Stanton said.

"Women help men settle down and become more domesticated, and men provide for women the kind of relationship that they need and the kind of companionship that they need that other women cannot provide.

"We understand biologically it clearly takes a significant contribution from a male and a female to bring new life into the world, but it also takes that sustained contribution over a lifetime to bring that new human life to full human development, and we know that male and female both contribute to that, or children [otherwise] will suffer."

Judge 'proud'

OTTAWA (BP) — The chief justice of the court that sparked the homosexual marriage movement in Canada is retiring, and he's not about to apologize for what many in that nation consider an appalling legal decision. Back in June 2003, the highest court in the province of Ontario issued a landmark ruling changing the definition of marriage from one man and one woman to "the voluntary union for life of two persons to the exclusion of all others." Immediately, same-sex couples across the province began "marrying." Most other provinces followed in legalizing such "unions," and in 2005 Canada's Parliament passed a bill legalizing homosexual marriage nationwide. Roy McMurtry, who is retiring after 11 years as chief justice of the Ontario Court of Appeal, said he is proud of the homosexual marriage ruling, which he helped write. In fact, he said it's the one decision by which he'd most want to be remembered. "It stressed the importance of individual rights and, particularly, individual dignity," McMurtry told the Toronto Star. "There's a segment in our society that believes that being gay or lesbian is immoral. Gays and lesbians have faced unfair discrimination over many years, but to me that's so obviously wrong. That's why it was important that the court judgment not only recognize the legitimacy of same-sex unions but describe it as a marriage." McMurtry noted that when Massachusetts' highest court legalized "gay marriage," it referenced the Ontario decision. He also said civil unions, which are legal in several American states as well as in the United Kingdom, fall short of what he believes should be legal. "[T]he term 'marriage' is important to send a message to society that the commitment of these couples should be just as respected as the commitment of a heterosexual couple, though any marriage can fall apart," McMurtry said. "That's why I stress the importance of individual dignity. I remember a young lawyer saying to me, 'You know, the day after the decision, my partner and I were lining up to go to a movie, and we felt better about our relationship and, therefore, felt better about ourselves.' The court decision had obviously sent an important message."



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THE SECOND FRONT PAGE

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Looking back

10 years ago

Mississippi missionaries Felix and Dene Greer are evacuated May 30 from the west African country of Sierra Leone after a coup against the democratically-elected government turned deadly with street fighting and random use of powerful military weapons.

20 years ago

Peace Committee chairman Charles Fuller, pastor of First Church, Roanoke, Va., expresses "genuine regret" about the inability of the Peace Committee to complete their report in time for release prior to the 1987 Southern Baptist Convention in St. Louis. He had hoped to release a report six weeks in advance of the annual meeting.

30 years ago

Another seminary to train Southern Baptist preachers will be established in the near future and will be located in Kansas City, Mo., following a decision made by the SBC in its Chicago meeting last week. W. Douglas Hudgins, of First Church, Jackson, chairs the committee.



YOU CAN RESPOND RIGHT NOW!

Simply share the following prayer with God in your own words:

1. Lord, I admit that I need you. (*I have sinned.*)

2. I want forgiveness for my sins and freedom from eternal death. (*I repent.*)

3. I believe Jesus died and rose from the grave to forgive my sins and to restore my relationship with you. (*I believe in Jesus.*)

4. By faith, I invite Jesus Christ into my life. From this time on, I want to live in a loving relationship with Him. (*I receive Christ as my Savior and Lord.*)

"But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in his name." (John 1:12)

If you make a decision for Jesus Christ today, contact a local Baptist church for spiritual guidance.

QUIT OR GET RAIN

All across the Southland, we have been dealing with drought conditions these past few years. Week after week, spring and summer are hot and dry with no clouds in the sky. You may not be a farmer, but you recognize that the farmer, as well as you, needs the rain. Even if you do not have a garden, a few plants, or much of a yard, you need rain. Ponds dry up, reservoirs and rivers drop, trees die, and grass turns brown. Sometimes after weeks and months of drought and the rain starts to fall, I have heard people say, "I wish it would quit raining!" I have also heard others say, "I wish we would get a rain."

Think about it! Some folks, because of their needs, want to get, and others because of what they perceive as their needs wish the rain would quit. Has it ever occurred to you how close these two words get and quit, sound alike? What if you moved from another country to America and had never taken English lessons and heard the sounds of the English language? You study hard wanting to learn the language and you hear these two words. By some definitions, they are close to opposites — to get or to quit. For those of us who speak English, or at least a Mississippi form of English, the words are nothing alike, but the more you repeat them the more they sound alike.

I wonder what it sounds like in the ears of God to hear us complaining one day wanting to get rain, and then when He provides it, He



Directions

Jim Futral, executive director-treasurer
Mississippi Baptist Convention Board

hears us say, "I wish it would quit raining!" I am confident that He can tell the difference, but it reminds me of what hard-to-please people we are. Of greater importance, more than just the sound of the words is how thankful I am that the weather is not in the control of a lot of folks.

I am glad that a committee does not decide the weather and determine when the sun will shine and the rain will fall. However, what if a committee was formed to decide what the weather was to be each week? If it were made up of representatives from every area of the state and composed of seven to nine people, who would you want to serve on this committee to decide something as strategic as rainfall that would affect all of us? Would this committee be comprised of all Baptists, or Methodists, or would you want someone from each of the major denominations? What groups of people would be represented such as race, economic status, farmers or office workers, teachers or college students? When you got your committee in place how in the world would you get all of them to agree? What blesses one group would invariably mess up the plans of another.

I am also glad that the rain in not controlled by our enemies. If that were the case, most of us would probably live in either a flood or a desert. Just suppose folks that do not like you had the privilege of saying how much rain you were going to receive. What a predicament!

I am certainly glad that our children are not in charge. Now I love my kids, and I hope they love me, but they do not always see things as I do. Maybe it is better stated that I do not always see things as they do. I remember back during the days when my son was playing Little League ball-games that it always seemed to rain on the first game of the new season. The farmers had been longing and praying for rain and it finally came. All the excitement, anticipation, and fun of beginning the season in Little League was dashed by raindrops. I am here to tell you my Little Leaguer was not happy. I wanted to take advantage of the opportunity and attempted to explain the bigger picture of life. I told my son how grateful the farmers were for the rain and how thankful we ought to be because the farmers grow everything we eat. It did not work. He would not buy my philosophizing about the rain

because the only thing he wanted was for the rain to stop. Most often children do not understand, and that is why our wise Heavenly Father does not put us in charge.

I am so glad that we are not in charge. Are you glad that you are not in charge of the rainfall? Some of you may be thinking you would like to be in charge. You probably would not last a day. First, you would have to face the problem of figuring out where the rain is needed and not needed. Then you would have to deal with all of the people who know more about it than you do. They would be calling, writing, faxing, and emailing you to explain why they need more or less rain. Hearing from all of them or all of us, you would probably develop a bad attitude about our distrust of your abilities and our ungratefulness for your goodness. I doubt that it would take long before you would want to resign.

I am thankful for a good and gracious God who knows just what we need and day by day and week by week, He provides for us. He knows when we need rain and He knows when what we really need is not water, but trust in Him when we think things are inadequate. Our Lord is a good God. I am thankful He cares for us when some of us are saying, "Get," and others are saying, "Quit." God always does the right thing because He cares for us.

The author may be contacted at P.O. Box 530, Jackson, MS 39205-0530. E-mail: jfutral@mbcb.org.

HOOMEOMINGS AND REVIVALS

Coila Church, Coila: Homecoming, June 3; services, 11 a.m., followed by lunch and afternoon singing; George Smith, speaker; Promised Quartet, music. Revival, June 4-8, 7 p.m. nightly; Roger Howell, speaker; Billy Blakely, pastor.

Coldwater Church, Philadelphia: Homecoming, June 10; services, 10:30 a.m., followed by potluck dinner; Barron Pilgrim, speaker; Fay and Reuben Moore, music.

Faith Church, Silver Creek: Revival, June 10-13; Sun., 11 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. with lunch at noon; Mon.-Wed., dinner, 6 p.m. and worship, 7 p.m.; Ray Ballard, Royce City, Tex., speaker; Sue Ballard, music; Ronald Ballard, interim pastor.

First Church, Marion, Lauderdale County: Homecoming, June 24; services, 10 a.m., followed by potluck dinner.

Hebron Church, Pheba: Homecoming, June 3; services, 11 a.m., followed by potluck lunch; Dickie Bryan, speaker; Sacred Heart and Debbie Walker, music.

Indian Springs Church, Petal: Homecoming, June 3; services, 11 a.m., followed by churchwide luncheon and 1:30 p.m. services; Richard "Mugsy" Davis speaker; Mr. and Mrs. Bobby Maskew, entertainment.

Mt. Carmel Church, Carthage: Revival, June 3-7; Sun., 11 a.m. and 6 p.m.; Mon.-Thurs., 7 p.m.; James Messer, speaker; Evelyn Dodds, music.

MIND THE GAP
Youth and Parents

Parent Conference
August 10th-12th, 2007

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W.L. Nobles, former MC president, dies

William Lewis Nobles, 81, president of Mississippi College (MC) in Clinton from 1968-1993, died May 25 at Hospice Ministries in Ridgeland. Funeral was held May 28 in the chapel of Lakewood Funeral Home in Jackson with interment in Lakewood Memorial Park.

Nobles resigned as MC president in 1993 and pled guilty in 1996 to federal charges involving donations meant for the Baptist-affiliated school that he admitted converting to his personal use. Court records indicate the total amount of missing money was as much as \$3.3 million.

Nobles is survived by his wife of over 58 years, Joy, of Clinton; a daughter, Sandra, of Clinton; and two grandchildren.

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THE MISSISSIPPI BAPTIST FOUNDATION

Spring 2007

Mississippi Baptist Foundation, P. O. Box 530, Jackson, MS 39205 or call 800-748-1652 or 601-292-3210

"Digesting a Frog"

Schoolchildren and teachers across our land are thrilled that the 2006-07 academic session is drawing to a close. With great anticipation of the upcoming break from school, the final days are marked off the calendar in celebratory fashion.

As a father of three children, I will be the first to admit how quickly this particular school year has flown by. My oldest son will be graduating from high school at the end of May, another son will be completing his first year of high school, and my daughter will be finishing her elementary career and move forward into middle school. To me, the beginning of this current school year seems like yesterday. After all, new clothes, shoes, and school supplies were just purchased a short time ago. Where has the school year gone?

I remember just a few months ago sitting at the supper table with my family following the first or second day of school. One of my sons asked his 5th-grade sister, "How was school today?" In between bites of food, she responded "Good!" Then, she added enthusiastically, "Guess what? This year in 5th grade, we get to *digest* a frog!" What followed at the dinner table was silence as

mom, dad, and two brothers made eye contact with each other while smiles curled slowly across our faces. After a moment, one of her brothers asked, "You mean *dissect*, don't you?" My daughter retorted, "**Whatever!**"

While the majority of folks would probably prefer not to dissect or digest a frog, many of us often feel like we are doing some of both when attempting to understand estate-planning tools and techniques. Therefore, your friends at the Mississippi Baptist Foundation

present this newsletter in an effort to offer insight and information that will be useful as you exercise Kingdom-minded stewardship in pursuit of your estate-planning and charitable-giving goals. Interspersed throughout this material are pictures of individuals who have utilized the ministries of the Foundation for their estate planning needs. Recent luncheons in Columbus, Meridian and Grenada were held in appreciation of these friends.



Daniel Hall
Executive Director
Mississippi Baptist Foundation

COLUMBUS AREA
September 26, 2006



Betty Coward, President BMC
Betty Jean Dowdle
John & Betty Jean Dowdle Scholarship Fund

Nathan Hamilton, Scholarship Recipient



Jamie Luecke & Sonny Luecke
Mississippi Missionary Parents' Fellowship



Wesley Platt
A. E. Lucas Memorial Fund
Charlie Holcomb
Betty & Frank Warren Trust



Michael Ball, Director MSU BSU
June Scoggins, MSU BSU



Jim Ford, Trustee MBF, Diane Ford,
Shawn Parker, Pastor FBC Columbus

**Donors honored
at luncheon**

The Mississippi Baptist Foundation held three Area Donor Appreciation Luncheons to honor the individuals and their families who have utilized our services to carry out their estate stewardship responsibilities. Information was

provided about the ministry and services of the Mississippi Baptist Foundation. Other functions like this are being planned for this year. Below are pictures taken from each of our functions in the Columbus, Meridian and Grenada areas.

GRENADA AREA
April 26, 2007

Mr. & Mrs. John Keeton
John & Margaret Keeton Trust Fund



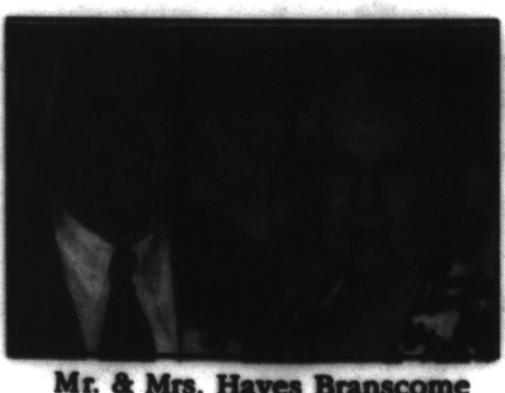
Rev. Truman Scarborough
AMD Yalobusha Association



Aubrey & Patsy Boone
Alan & Cindy Boone
Winona
Trust for BCV



Rev. & Mrs. James Allen
Water Valley
Trust Fund to Benefit BCV
Reedy Acres



Mr. & Mrs. Hayes Branscome
Grenada
Charitable Remainder Unitrust
to Benefit BCV

MERIDIAN AREA
March 2, 2007

John R. Tillery
Beth Tillery Memorial
for Lottie Moon



Rev. & Mrs. David Sellers
Toombsboro
Toombsboro Baptist Church



Mrs. Helen M. Smiley
Boswell and Wade Trust Funds

Mr. & Mrs. T.C. Pinson
Little Rock
Vira N. Rice Memorial Scholarship



Virginia Williams
Thomas Williams
Scholarship Trust



Kelton Valentine
Herbert Valentine Memorial
Scholarship Fund for NOBTS



Last Will and Testament

Perhaps the first and foremost estate-planning tool that needs dissecting is the Last Will and Testament. In a nutshell, a Will is a legal document that "speaks" on behalf of a person after their death. Through a Will, an individual is able to communicate the manner by which their accumulated assets (monetary, securities, real property, household items, family heirlooms, etc.) are distributed. Parents may utilize their Will to provide for minor children by establishing a trust and appointing a guardian. Individuals may also favor one or more charitable causes within the context of their Last Will and Testament. Unfortunately, many people neglect to have a valid Will prepared despite all of the blessings and peace of mind that this important document affords. The Foundation strives to encourage every Mississippi Baptist to establish a valid Will. Please contact the Foundation office at (601) 292-3210 for additional information regarding your Last Will and Testament.

Charitable Gift Annuity

Another estate-planning and charitable-giving tool for which dissection might be helpful is the Charitable Gift Annuity. A Charitable Gift Annuity is a contract between the donor and the Mississippi Baptist Foundation whereby the Foundation invests donated assets and distributes a predetermined income stream for the life of the donor(s). The Mississippi Baptist Foundation administers a host of gift annuities on behalf of individuals who not only need a guaranteed annual income, but who also desire to favor Kingdom ministries with any residual assets in the fund following the annuitant's death.

Advantages of a Charitable Gift Annuity may include: (1) guaranteed income stream for one or two lives at an attractive pay-out percentage, (2) tax-free income on a portion of the annual distribution, (3) charitable deduction, and (4) residual benefit to Baptist causes. The following table illustrates some of the advantages of a Charitable Gift Annuity:

Benefits of a Charitable Gift Annuity (\$10,000.00*)

Age	Gift Amount	Rate	Guaranteed Annual Income	Tax-Free Income	Taxable Income	Charitable Deduction
60	\$10,000	5.7%	\$570	\$266.19	\$303.81	\$3,580.90
65	\$10,000	6.0%	\$600	\$304.20	\$295.80	\$3,949.00
70	\$10,000	6.5%	\$650	\$360.10	\$289.90	\$4,276.60
75	\$10,000	7.10%	\$710	\$428.13	\$281.87	\$4,688.40
80	\$10,000	8.00%	\$800	\$521.60	\$278.40	\$5,100.60
85	\$10,000	9.5%	\$950	\$675.45	\$274.55	\$5,403.90
90	\$10,000	11.3%	\$1,130	\$849.72	\$280.24	\$5,833.50

*These figures are for illustrative purposes only and should not be construed as tax or financial advice. The \$10,000 figure is merely an example. We would be glad to provide additional illustrations based upon your specific age and annuity amount. Calculations for two lives are also available upon request.

Charitable Remainder Trusts

A Charitable Remainder Trust is an estate-planning tool that may need some dissecting in order to understand how these strategies may enhance individual estate plans. When establishing a Charitable Remainder Trust, the donor irrevocably transfers assets – usually cash, securities, or real estate – to a trustee such as the Mississippi Baptist Foundation. The trustee invests the trust's assets and provides the donor with an income stream for life. Upon the death of the donor(s), the example of generosity and Christian stewardship will yield continual blessings for a designated Mississippi Baptist or Southern Baptist cause such as the donor's church, the Baptist Children's Village, our Mississippi Baptist colleges, the Cooperative Program, or missions.

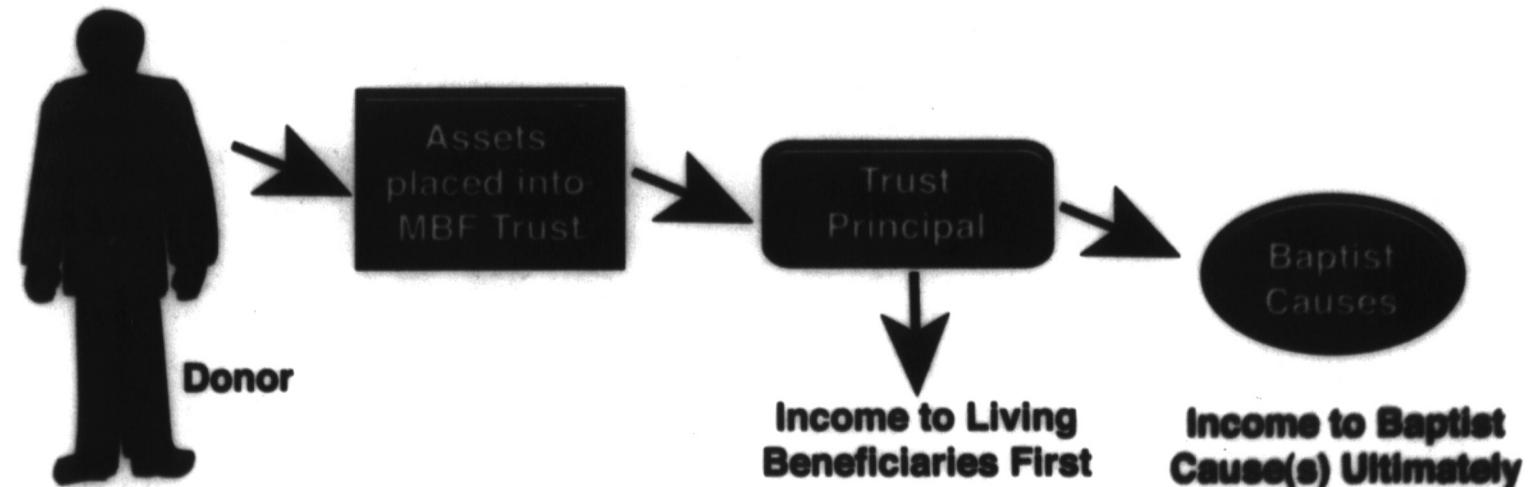
Charitable Remainder Trusts come in the form of a Unitrust or an Annuity trust. Both types of charitable remainder trusts have several common features, while both also maintain a measure of distinctiveness. The benefits of both the Charitable Remainder Unitrust (CRUT) and the Charitable Remainder Annuity Trust (CRAT) include:

- (1) a charitable deduction for income tax purposes,
- (2) possible estate tax benefits,
- (3) the donor(s) receives an income stream

for life, and

- (4) both the CRUT and the CRAT provide residual benefits to a charitable beneficiary(ies) prescribed by the donor within the trust documentation.

Perhaps the primary difference between the Unitrust and the Annuity trust resides in the area of income distribution. A Charitable Remainder Unitrust (CRUT) offers life income which will vary with changes in the trust's market value. A Charitable Remainder Annuity Trust (CRAT), on the other hand, distributes a fixed annual amount for the life of the donor(s) regardless of shifts in the trust's market value due to the prevailing economic conditions. Donors desiring the security of a guaranteed income distribution may find an annuity trust arrangement to be the most favorable.



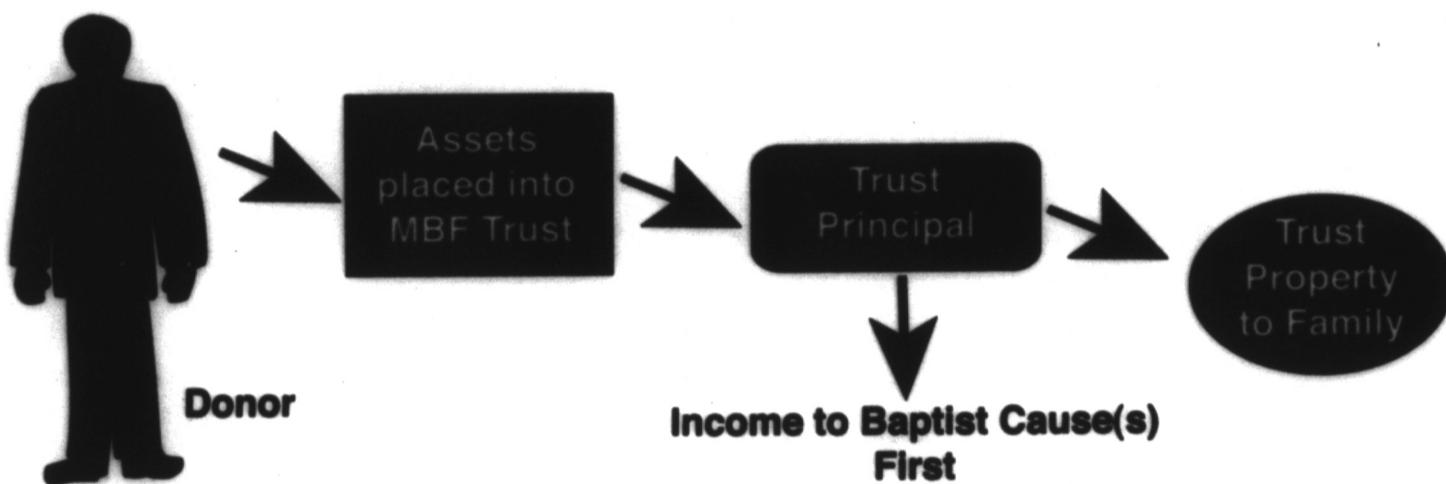
Charitable Lead Trusts

A Charitable Lead Trust (CLT) is a "first cousin" to the CRUT and the CRAT in terms of function and purpose. Wherein a Charitable Remainder Trust provides income benefits to the donor(s) for their lifetime and favors charitable Kingdom causes ultimately, a Charitable Lead Trust functions just the opposite. With a CLT, the earnings derived from the contributed assets are distributed to the charitable cause(s) for a prescribed period of years. Thus, the "lead" interest of the CLT is for the charitable ministries that are

favored by the donor. Then, following the expiration of the stated term, the assets in the trust are distributed to the donor's living beneficiaries. Typically, the ultimate beneficiaries of a Charitable Lead Trust are the donor's children or grandchildren.

The benefits of a Charitable Lead Trust may include:

- (1) assisting charitable causes sooner rather than later,
- (2) reducing or eliminating estate and/or gift taxes,
- (3) potential income tax reduction in the form of a charitable deduction,
- (4) opportunity to assist Baptist cause in the present while retaining the trust's assets for use by future beneficiaries.



In all likelihood, only a handful of us will have the opportunity to *dissect* a frog. Fewer still are the number of folks who will be confronted with the challenge of *digesting* a frog. All of us, however, will face the opportunity and challenge of deciding how to accomplish our stewardship and estate-planning goals. For Christians, these

decisions are made by "seeking first the Kingdom of God." My prayer for you is that you won't approach your future with a "*Whatever*" kind of attitude.

To this end, please feel free to call our office or use the attached form to request additional information. Your friends at the Mississippi Baptist Foundation look forward to the privilege of coming alongside of you as a "laborer together with God."

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JUST FOR THE RECORD



1. Easter egg hunt, McAdams Church, McAdams



2. Senior Adult Day, First Church, Soso

- McAdams Church, McAdams**, held a children's church wide Easter egg hunt Apr. 7. Shown are the Mission Friends of the church. James Young, pastor.
- First Church, Soso**, honored its senior adults with an Appreciation Day Apr. 29. Shown are the participants.

- Woodland Hills Church, Jackson**, hosted the state Youth Keyboard Festival Feb. 24. Five of the eight students participating were awarded a \$25 scholarship to a Baptist sponsored event of their choice. Shown are the participants. Also, Christopher Ray, Sumrall, was awarded a \$200 scholarship at the event. Ray will attend Mississippi College in the fall as a music major with an emphasis in organ.



Ray



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3. Youth Keyboard Festival, Woodland Hills Church, Jackson

STAFF CHANGES

- Petal-Harvey Church, Petal**, has called Tracey Hipps as pastor, effective May 27. Hipps comes from Central Church, McComb, and received degrees from the Southern Baptist School for Biblical Studies.



- First Church, McLaurin**, has called Neil Harvison as pastor. Harvison comes with his wife Raye Anne and daughter Rylee. He holds degrees from Pearl River Community College and William Carey University and is continuing seminary studies. He was Athletic Director and teacher at Sacred Heart School in Hattiesburg.



- First Church, Mathiston**, has called Wade Stevens as pastor. He previously pastored Wake Forest Church, Sturgis. He is a graduate of New Orleans Seminary, and is married to Brandi and has one child, Trey.



3. Stevens and wife Brandi

VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL

First Church, Raleigh: June 4–8, 9 a.m.–noon; ages 4–completed 6th grade; commencement service, June 10, 6 p.m.

Indian Springs Church, Petal: June 4–8, 6–8:30 p.m.

Lakeshore Church, Jackson: June 10–15, 5:45–8:15 p.m.

Sunrise Church, Petal: June 18–22, 6–8:30 p.m.

Stanton Baptist Church: June 4–8, 9 a.m.–noon; ages 4 through 6th grade.



The Mosers

Blue Mountain College's 2007 yearbook, *The Mountaineer*, was dedicated to Jack and Tracy Moser. Tracy Moser serves as the director of the College's Baptist Student Union and Jack Moser has served as women's basketball coach and associate professor of physical education. Together, the couple have served a total of 35 years at the College.

MS POSITIONS

MINISTER OF MUSIC and education needed: First Baptist Church, Boyle, Miss., is currently seeking a full-time Minister of Music and Education. More details available. Contact us at FBCBoyle@cableone.net. Send resumes via email or P.O. Box 218, Boyle, MS 38730.

PRAISE AND WORSHIP BAND starting at County Line Baptist Church, Crystal Springs, MS. All positions available. Please call (601) 892-1151 or (662) 312-8564 for more information.

COUNTY LINE BAPTIST CHURCH is accepting resumes for the position of bi-vocational youth pastor. All resumes should be sent to P.O. Box 578, Crystal Springs, MS 39059 or emailed to MackR612@aol.com.

CALVARY BAPTIST CHURCH of Waynesboro, Miss., is seeking a Children's/Preschool Director. The director will work full-time and paid a salary based on experience and education. For more information, (601) 735-2333. Send resumes to Calvary Baptist Church, attn: personnel committee director, 615 South Street, Waynesboro, MS 39367.

FULL-TIME MINISTER OF STUDENTS, Sladen Baptist Church, Lamar, Miss., at the center of a growing rural suburb of Memphis, Tennessee. Candidates who have completed a seminary degree with 2-5 years of full-time experience may send resumes to search committee, 2534 Highway 72, Lamar, MS 38642. Email: slaydenchurch@bellsouth.net or fax (662) 252-5248.

BROOKSVILLE BAPTIST CHURCH, Brooksville, Miss., is seeking a bi-vocational music director. Send resumes to Janice Kesler, music chairman, 2922 Fire Tower Rd., Crawford, MS 39743.

CENTER HILL BAPTIST CHURCH, Hamilton, Mississippi, is seeking a bi-vocational Minister of Music. Please send resume to Center Hill Baptist Church, Music Search Committee, P.O. Box 59, Hamilton, MS, 39746.

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, Plantersville, Miss., seeks a part-time Youth Minister. Please submit resumes to First Baptist Church, P.O. Box 487, Plantersville, MS 38862. Or email to firstbaptist800@comcast.net.

Baptists settle in Miss., start association

Fourth in a series

By Frank Lay
Correspondent

To escape the ravages of the Revolutionary War, a group of Baptists led by Richard Curtis, Sr., fled their homes in South Carolina, and migrated to the Natchez Country in what is now Mississippi. Because of the strong Catholic influence of the ruling Spaniards in Natchez, the immigrants settled along Cole's Creek about 20 miles north of Natchez.

Following the death of Richard Curtis, Sr., his son Richard, Jr., became the spiritual leader of the settlers and led religious services in homes throughout the community. In October, 1791, seven Baptists met in the home of Margaret Braid Stampley and organized the Salem Baptist Church in the village of Stampley. Richard Curtis, Jr., who had been licensed by the Welch Neck Baptist Church in South Carolina, was called as pastor. Because of its location, the Salem Baptist Church has often been referred to as Cole's Creek Baptist Church.

William Hamberlin, a prominent citizen, and Stephen DeAlvo, a Spaniard, were among Richard's first converts. Since Richard was not ordained, his home church in South Carolina granted permission for the Salem church to designate someone to conduct the ordinances. The members at Salem appointed Curtis, who then baptized Hamberlin and DeAlvo.

The baptism of DeAlvo, a former Catholic, infuriated the Spaniards. Curtis later presided over the marriage of his niece which further incensed the Catholics against the tiny congregation. Because of persecution the Salem church often conducted secret services away from the prying eyes of the authorities. Lookouts were posted to warn the congregation whenever the authorities were approaching.

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Curtis, Hamberlin, and DeAlvo were forced into exile or else face imprisonment in the silver mines of Mexico. For a time they hid in the home of a friend in Bayou Pierre near Port Gibson. Fearful of the Spanish threats, the members at Salem were afraid to help the exiles with their escape. Thanks to the heroic efforts of a courageous lady named Chloe Holt, the fugitives received horses and supplies and began their journey up the Natchez Trace and on to Curtis' former home in South Carolina.

During his exile, Richard Curtis was ordained and duly authorized to constitute a Baptist Church upon returning to the Cole's Creek.

When the United States gained control of the Natchez Country, religious freedom was granted in the Mississippi Territory. The members of Salem quickly built a house of worship constructed with logs. Upon his return in 1798, Richard Curtis led in a formal constitution of the church which had existed since 1791.

By 1805, five new churches had been planted in the southwestern Mississippi Territory. In September 1806, representatives from five of the six churches gathered at Salem and organized the Mississippi Baptist Association.

Mississippi Baptists in the 21st century certainly owe a debt of gratitude to Richard Curtis, Jr. and to the Salem Baptist Church. By the grace of God, the mother church for Baptists in southwestern Mississippi survived tremendous obstacles during her first years of existence.

Other churches came into being as a result of her influence. Moreover, Salem took the initiative in organizing the first Baptist association in Mississippi.

Though Salem Baptist Church had triumphed over the persecution of the Spaniards, it was internal conflict which ultimately led to

her demise. Twice, Salem petitioned the association for assistance in resolving conflicts. When over half the membership withdrew from the church in 1823, Salem never regained her influence.

On August 29, 1834, the mother church of Mississippi Baptists officially disbanded.

Lay is associational missions director for Carroll-Montgomery Association in Winona. He may be contacted at carrmont@bellsouth.net. Next week: The first Baptist association in Mississippi.

CLASSIFIED ADS

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH ZACHARY is seeking full-time Children's Minister. Please send resumes to 4200 Main St., Zachary, LA 70791, attn: Lauren Baudouin or email laurenb02@hotmail.com.

EAST CENTRAL LOUISIANA Baptist Association is seeking a full-time Associational Missionary. All interested applicants should send resume and cover letter to Dan Glenn, 100 N. Hickory St., Vidalia, LA 71373 or email dan@fbcvidalia.com before June 8.

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FULL-TIME CHILDREN'S PASTOR Clearview Baptist Church of Birmingham, Alabama is accepting resumes for the position of full-time Children's Pastor. Send resume to: Clearview Baptist Church, Attn: Children's Pastor Search Committee, 5271 Old Springville Road, Pinson, AL 35126 or email Connie@clearviewbaptist.com.

FULL-TIME STUDENT PASTOR Clearview Baptist Church of Birmingham, Alabama is accepting resumes for the position of full-time Student Pastor. Send resume to: Clearview Baptist Church, attn: Student Pastor Search Committee, 5271 Old Springville Road, Pinson, AL 35126 or email Connie@clearviewbaptist.com.

LAWRENCEVILLE FIRST BAPTIST Church is accepting resumes for a full-time Senior Pastor. We are located in Gwinnett County, Georgia. Please mail a resume, as well as a DVD, VCR or other media, to Pastor Search Committee, P.O. Box 228, Lawrenceville, GA 30046-0028.

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JASPER COUNTY BAPTIST ASSOCIATION located in Bay Springs, Ms is seeking a part-time bi-vocational Association Missions Director. This is a part-time position, and the position does not include housing facilities. Please send resumes no later than July 1, 2007 to Jasper County Baptist Association, P.O. Box 385, Bay Springs, Ms. 39422.

FOR LEASE OR SALE: Byram Day Care Center. Established business, zoned for daycare, 3200 square feet bldg, w/2 acres of land; \$2,950 month lease. Nick Clark, broker/owner, (601) 317-2536.

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BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE

Admit Your Struggle with Sin

Deuteronomy 1:6-8; 26-33, 42-46

By Laura Leathers

The Pentateuch

*"In Genesis the world was made,
In Exodus the march was told;
Leviticus contains the Law,
In Numbers are the tribes enrolled;
In Deuteronomy again
We're urged to keep God's law alone.
And these five books of Moses make
The oldest writings that are known."*

by Dr. Henrietta C. Mears

The book of Deuteronomy takes place in one location and does not advance historically. This book details Moses giving the new generation of Israelites a synopsis of their history through a series of speeches. He reminds them God is faithful to fulfill His covenant promise. Additionally, he challenges them to see their need for spiritual renewal before they enter the Promised Land.

Leathers



Forty years earlier the Israelites left Egypt and marched on to Mount Sinai where the Law and the covenant were given. Now it was time to depart for the Promised Land which God had set before them. How did they answer the following questions? How would you answer the following questions?

1. Are You Going Where God Leads? (Deut. 1:6-8)

Moses hones in on the Israelites' journey with their God-given destiny. There are three things we can observe. First, notice that God gave the people a clear direction and description of the land. Second, they would find it necessary to take the land by conquest. A huge challenge, but God was with them to possess the land. Third, the covenant was originally established with Abraham, affirmed again to Isaac and

Jacob, and God would bring it to completion (Gen. 15:18-21; 26:3-5; 28:13-14; 35:12).

The Israelites had a choice to make. Would they be obedient and follow God out of their settled situations and comfort zones? More than words to a song, *Wherever He Leads I'll Go* is to be a way of life.

2. Are You Controlled by Discouragement? (Deut. 1:26-28)

Moses led the Israelites from Horeb through the great and terrible wilderness and came to Kadesh Barnea, the entrance to the Land of Promise. Rather than listening and obeying God, the Israelites chose to listen to ten men whose ability to see the land of milk and honey was obscured by the giants who dwelt in the land (Numbers 13-14). In her book, *As Silver Refined*, Kay Arthur lists the Deadly "D's": disappointment, discouragement, dejection, despair, and demoralization. Disappointed with their circumstances and the challenges which lay ahead, the Israelites quickly fell into discouragement. Rather than admit

their sin of unbelief, they chose to experience the Deadly "D's" and rebel against the command of God.

God had given clear directions. The land was set before them. They were to possess the land, and not be afraid. The biggest problem with discouragement — it can hinder our ability to hear God and be obedient to God's Word. What are the giants in your life? Are they hindering your faith in the Lord?

3. Are you Distrustful of God's Help? (Deut. 1:29-33)

How quickly we forget all that the Lord has done for us! Moses reminds the people to remember the Lord's powerful ways in Egypt and recall how His presence was with them through their wilderness experience. Yet, they refused to remember, to believe, to trust, and take the Lord at His Word.

Remember it is God who equips and empowers us. When we don't trust God we are saying "I don't think You are able," but His Word reminds us over and over again that He is more than able (Ephesians 3:20). You can trust His heart, His ways, His words and His promises.

4. Are you Defying God's Commands? (Deut. 1:42-46)

Have you ever told a child not to do something and then watch as they proceed to do exactly what you just told them not to do? The Israelites had been told they would not enter into the Promised Land because of their unbelief and disobedience. Rather than repenting, they choose to compound their sin by fighting the Amorites, exactly what God told them not to do. When we defy God's commands there will be short and long-term consequences.

We all struggle with sin (1 John 1:9-10). Sin will take us to the wilderness. Whereas, walking in obedience will take us through the Promised Land, not without challenges, but with the assurance in Christ we are more than conquerors.

As you begin this new series, spend time in prayer, admit your struggle with sin, and ask for God's forgiveness and His strength to obey daily. Then march forward with a loving and obedient heart!

Leathers is a member of First Baptist Church, Durant.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Appropriate God's Mercy

Joel 1:15-15, 2:12-13, 18, 25-32

By Charles Rodgers

Natural disasters have always provided opportunities for serious questions. Some question whether or not God himself sent the disaster. Others question whether God even cares when we experience devastation. I have recently been heavily involved in the recovery and rebuilding process following hurricane Katrina. I have heard it all. Some people have publicly stated that God sent Katrina to warn the people of the Gulf-coast to repent of their sins and get right with God. Others seem to feel that God was specifically punishing certain people for their evil deeds. Still others have admitted that they were not at all sure what God's involvement was in the storm. Regardless of how or why

Katrina came, we have all sensed the need to draw closer to God.

Joel uses a natural disaster to forecast the impending invasion of Judah's enemies. He recollects the experience of a locust plague that devastated the land and the people. In chapter one, he prefacing his message to the people of Judah by calling upon the people to pay close attention to what he is about to say.

In the focal passage, Joel calls upon the people of Judah to:

I. Regard God's Warnings – Joel 1:15-16

Alas for the day! The day of the Lord is at hand! The day of the Lord is a term found several times in Scripture and it always refers to a time when the Lord acts in a mighty way either to

bring judgment or deliverance. Joel uses this term four times in the first two chapters. In 1:15, he seems to indicate that the day of the Lord is already here. In 2:1 and 2:11, he warns of a day of doom and despair in the immediate future. In 2:31, he seems to be speaking of a time of judgment coming in the distant future.

In chapter 1:15-16, Joel is referring to the plague of locusts and to a worse judgment coming in the form of a military invasion. The Message puts it this way "What a day! Doomsday! God's judgment day has come. The Strong God has arrived, this is serious business." Joel is warning the old men and all the inhabitants of Judah to pay attention to what is happening around them. The plague of locusts has come as an act of judgment against them for their sins. We would do well to consider whether our own adverse circumstances might be God's way of warning us that we too

are going in the wrong direction and we need to turn back to God.

II. Respond to God's Invitation – Joel 2:12-13

In chapter 2:1-11, Joel describes Jerusalem being overrun by invaders from the north. He again warns that the day of the Lord is imminent. He presents the events of the day as darkness and gloom creating a sense of danger and spiritual dearth. It is an experience like Jerusalem has never known. It is a scene of total devastation. Against this backdrop, Joel calls for individual and national repentance. It is a plea not just from Joel but also from the Lord. It must be a genuine heart-felt experience evidenced by fasting and weeping. The result of such repentance would procure God's mercy, graciousness, and kindness. The ultimate end would be that God would reverse the misfortunes of Judah and restore them to a time of plenty.

III. Rejoice in God's Promises – Joel 2:18, 25-32

If we heed God's warning to turn from our personal and our national sins, then God will pour out His mercy upon us. He will shower us with His Spirit, and He will save all who will call upon His name.

Rodgers is Associational Missions Director for Jackson Association and a member of First Church, Gautier.

Guidelines for submitting news and photographs



The Baptist Record is pleased to publish news and photographs of special events that take place in cooperating churches of the Mississippi Baptist Convention.

News submitted for publication in The Baptist Record must be either (a) typewritten, (b) neatly printed on 8 1/2 by 11-inch paper, or (c) neatly printed on standardized forms provided by the newspaper. All articles must be received in writing; no articles will be accepted over the telephone.

News may be submitted electronically to the address below, and must be contained in the message segment of an e-mail form. Due to increasing virus threats, no text attachments will be accepted.

Photograph attachments are permissible.

Please make articles concise. Include the **who, what, when, where** details of the story, along with a contact person's address and telephone number.

Photographs may be color or black and white. Instant photos and digital printouts

are not reproducible. Digital photos may be used if submitted as a JPEG file via either (a) e-mail, (b) three-and-a-half inch floppy disk, or (c) CD. Photos must be clear, sharp, and well-lighted.

All news items are subject to editing, and all photographs are subject to crop-

ping. Photographs must depict people. No landscape-, building-, or object-only photographs will be printed. News items and/or photographs can be published one time only. Deadline for submitting news is one week prior to requested publication date.

Articles that are not date-sensitive will be published on a space-available basis. Requests to return photographs must be accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope.

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JUST FOR THE RECORD

Bibliocipher

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GI OLV LQWF BZEV
AQFOL AGIJVFH QA Z
EZI'H LZIC, ZIC MFQOV
QKVF ZJZGIHO OLV
BZICXVHOCBP WDQI OLV
DXZGHOVF QA OLV
MZXX QA OLV PGIJ'H
DZXZBV; ZIC OLV PGIJ
HZM OLV DZFO QA OLV
LZIC OLZO MFQOV.
CZIGVX AGKV:AGKV

Clue: B = C

Have fun with cryptography and exercise your Bible knowledge. A King James Version Bible verse has been encoded by letter substitution. The same letter is substituted throughout the puzzle. Solve by trial and error. Answer to last week's puzzle: Mark Six: Fifty-six.



1. Bible Drillers, Fair River Church, Lincoln Association



2. Sanders honored, Tuscola Church, Lena



3. Groundbreaking, Bayou Talla Fellowship Church, Kiln

3. Bayou Talla Fellowship Church, Kiln, recently broke ground on its \$1.2 million Community Learning Center. The structure will house a daycare, indoor play area, adult education facility, and computer lab. Shown are the participants.

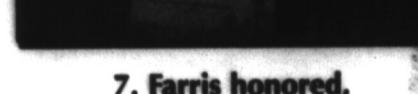
7. Lucille Farris, First Church, Batesville, was honored on her 93rd birthday by one of the church's mission groups that changed their name to the Lucille Farris Mission Group.



4. The children of First Church, Leakesville, presented the musical King of the Jungle Apr. 29. Shown are the participants.



5. Maravilloso Salvador Church, Cleveland, recognized its mothers with corsages given by their children on Mother's Day. Shown are the Rojas, Miranda, Miranda, and Cordero families, with pastor's wife Joanne Young in the background.



6. Cedar View Church, Olive Branch, is hosting a community singing June 16, 6 p.m., featuring The Reeves Family.

7. Farris honored,
First Church, Batesville



4. Children performing King of the Jungle, First Church, Leakesville



5. Mother's Day, Maravilloso Salvador Church, Cleveland

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